

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Louis Raphael

Corporation for Manufacturing Excellence (Manex)

Louis Raphael Zips Up Productivity Gains Of 30 Percent

Client Profile:

Louis Raphael, the Brisbane, California-based apparel manufacturer, provides high-quality, tailored trousers for fashion-conscious men who appreciate quality and value. Its products are sold in high-profile retail stores such as Sears Roebuck, The Men's Warehouse, Ross, Mervyn's, Marshalls, T.J. Maxx, Macy's, and May Company Stores. The company got its start importing wigs in 1972, evolved to making shirts and suits in the later 1970s, and finally focused exclusively on manufacturing pants. The company currently employs less than 100 people.

Situation:

Louis Raphael's management had a vision for expansion, but they knew that existing systems made this vision out of the question. The company's success as an industry leader balanced on the shoulders of an antiquated inventory system. Shipping and warehouse tracking was manual, inventory was not accurate, orders shipped late or not at all.

The company decided to make major computer system upgrades to the operation, including a new scanning system for "real-time" inventory management, and the ability to transmit orders through an EDI system. This decision represented a huge commitment and would involve not only equipment purchases and a complete restructuring of the warehouse, but would also require extensive training of the staff.

Although Louis Raphael originally planned to deliver the specialized computer training itself, the endeavor proved to carry a considerable expense. The company turned to the Corporation for Manufacturing Excellence (Manex), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for help obtaining state funding through the Employment Training Panel and coordinating the training program.

Solution:

Manex guided the development of Louis Raphael's training program and advised its structure and roll-out. As training commenced, a new spirit of enthusiasm and excitement could be felt, which opened up communications and energized the company. One of the unexpected benefits of the training included the development of a workforce that, suddenly empowered, was not afraid to speak up. Workers felt their opinions and experience were valued by the company, and began questioning quality issues that in the past would have been passed through the system, causing rework and other costly clean-up. The training

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helped to illustrate that there are no stupid or bad questions. As a result, the workers have become more efficient and more dependable. Before the training program, expansion was just a dream. Now the company is poised for growth and organized to handle it. The training project made such a major difference in productivity and morale that Louis Raphael (with guidance from Manex) is now conducting training in all areas of the company. In addition, the company is primed to use its new computer system, and is experiencing immediate benefits from the change.

Results:

- Increased shipped units by 60 percent over the previous year.
- Increased productivity by 30 percent over the month prior to training.
- Improved inventory accuracy by 50 percent.
- Improved on-time orders from 70 to 99.9 percent.
- Improved employee morale and communications.

Testimonial:

"I thank Manex for helping our company move closer to our vision for expansion. The training has helped us become more cost effective. We will become a stronger competitor and will be able to sell to more customers. We are already working with numerous new customers."

Bill Kim, President